

Like a Toddler, Public Square Matures

The Focus Changes as our Communities Evolve

BY JEANETTE SIEMENS



Jeanette Siemens

My first grandchild, Eadie, is 15 years old. I remember the day she arrived. It was the day before my birthday. What a wonderful birthday gift! Now she is almost as tall as I. She says taller. Eadie is very much a young lady. But the journey to the capable person she is today came in stages. She learned to walk. Words came first, then sentences. She played with Barbies and imaginary friends; now she is driving her own pickup and demonstrating leadership. More amazing changes are to come.

From an infant nurtured by founder Terry Woodbury to eight colleagues spread across Kansas, and from a few communities facilitated by Terry to many communities facilitated by me and my colleagues, Public Square Communities has been “growing up” in stages. As we matured, along with more communities came requests for special projects like multi-county planning, workforce housing and cultural diversity.

As my grandchild Eadie grew up, my grandparenting style needed to change. So it was with Public Square. Expanding territory and services required our organization to change.

In 2011, we began a long-term succession plan so Public Square could grow as our founder shifted toward retirement. Colleagues documented both the history and model Terry first developed and the new methods that were emerging. Next, as ownership changed from Terry to the colleagues, the LLC became a corporation. Terry became past-president and focused on mentoring a new president, Liz Hendricks.

And now, as 2014 nears, our step-by-step transition to the next generation of leadership has taken us into a shared leadership model. Just as our communities rely on “co-conveners” who

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share the load, Public Square’s leadership is a team.

Liz Hendricks has become our financial officer (CFO). Liz Sosa is our administrative head (CEO), and I handle internal communication and programming as COO: chief operations officer. Yet our core Public Square process remains the same: we link all sectors—human service, education, business and government—for positive conversations that build on assets. And together, our colleagues span a wide terrain: Liz Sosa (Garden City), Jeanette Siemens (Pratt), Liz Hendricks (Howard), Angie Baur (Towanda), Rick Behrens (Kansas City), Lance Woodbury (Garden City), Tim Steffensmeier (Manhattan) and Terry Woodbury (Leoti).

Thankfully, God-willing, my lovely granddaughter will continue to grow and change. Public Square, too, will grow; adapting and maturing in positive ways. And though I relish those memories of my little pre-schooler serving make-believe tea, I am proud of her independent spirit and the path she is taking. Close behind is her brother, Cole, and his is another marvellous story—plus another column for sure!

I am as proud of Public Square Communities’ growth as that of my two wonderful grandchildren. Yesterday has gifted me with new skills and extraordinary memories. Tomorrow will open new vistas. And my faith tells me most assuredly, “God is good all the time.” **KCL**

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